



Dr. Suzanne Fortier  
President  
Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada  
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Ottawa, ON, Canada  
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March 9, 2011

Dear Dr. Fortier,

The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) would like to thank NSERC for revising its decision regarding Scholarship and Fellowship funding for students in clinically-oriented programs. As per your letter dated May 3, 2010, students who are registered, or intend to register, in a clinically-oriented program will be eligible for NSERC funding if:

- 1) they propose a research project deemed eligible to be funded by NSERC; and
- 2) they are supervised by a researcher holding an active NSERC Discovery Grant.

The CPA appreciates that NSERC has had to establish guidelines around subject eligibility with respect to NSERC's mandate that it excludes health sciences research and thus does not support clinically-oriented research. As we noted in the position paper we sent you and which is posted on our website, 10-30% of clinical psychology Ph.D. graduates do not pursue a health-research or practitioner-based career but instead find employment in universities or institutes where they continue to work on basic science – NSERC-related projects – rather than health-related research.

One of our primary concerns with NSERC's initial decision was that it meant that a proportion of psychology students were excluded from federal funding altogether. While your recent decision has lowered the proportion of those affected, there remain a percentage of students without a federal funding option, despite working on basic science, NSERC-related research projects:

- individuals whose supervisors do not hold an active NSERC Discovery Grant;
- individuals whose supervisor loses (or completes) his or her NSERC Discovery Grant during the student's tenure; and
- individuals who apply in their final undergraduate year and are not able to determine who they will be working with and hence, whether the potential supervisor holds an NSERC Discovery Grant.

Following receipt of your May 2010 letter, the CPA had the opportunity to speak with Isabelle Blain, Vice-President, Research Grants and Scholarships. During this conversation, we respectfully asked that NSERC remove the restriction that one's supervisor must hold an active NSERC Discovery Grant – doing so is more consistent with the Discovery Grant Application process itself in which research is judged on the merit of its intention and not the program in which a faculty member is registered. Doing so would also be consistent with SSHRC eligibility criteria which no longer funds health-oriented research. Ms. Blain informed the CPA that NSERC would not change its criteria for at least a 2-year period; during this time, she indicated that NSERC would be collecting data on the issue and encouraged CPA to do the same.

In response, the CPA posted a survey to its members in January of this year. Survey results were quite telling and are highlighted below:

- Approximately 30% of students would not have a funding option or who would be otherwise negatively impacted by the second criterion.
- When asked about their agreement/disagreement with the two NSERC criteria, 76% of respondents agreed with NSERC's first criterion, but disagreed with the second criterion. Respondents stated that this criterion applies only to clinical and clinical neuropsychology students and that unless NSERC plans to require that ALL award recipients be supervised by NSERC funded supervisors, the criterion is discriminatory.

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- 94% of respondents believe that an applicant's eligibility for funding should be determined on the basis of his or her proposed research rather than the funding that has been awarded to his or her supervisor.
- Respondents were also asked to tell us why they felt a clinical psychology student in a given department might not be able to apply for NSERC funding under the current eligibility criteria, despite the fact that his or her research interests best align with NSERC's funding mandate. These reasons included:
  - supervisor is a new faculty member and does not hold an active NSERC Discovery grant
  - supervisor has held an NSERC grant in the past but has since lost or completed their grant and is now in between grants
  - student does not know with whom they will be working and hence whether he/she holds an active NSERC grant
  - supervisor may be funded through other granting agencies
  - size of psychology department and unavailability of faculty with NSERC funding to take on additional students

As previously noted, many of our respondents indicated that NSERC should base its funding decisions solely on the nature of one's research and not on the funding status of one's supervisor or program of study; to do otherwise is to single clinical and clinical neuropsychology students out without apparent justification. However, if this criterion is to remain, respondents suggested that it be modified in various ways, including: allowing a supervisor to have held an active NSERC grant in the past or allowing a student to have an NSERC funded faculty member on their committee.

If this criterion is not removed or modified, clinical or clinical neuropsychology students with a scientific interest in basic research are being deemed un-fundable by the Councils and the Canadian government because they are being denied the opportunity to apply for any tri-council funding. In addition, it is short sighted for the future of Canadian science. As more and more projects become interdisciplinary this type of silo thinking will only hold back the advancement of Canadian scientific research and innovation.

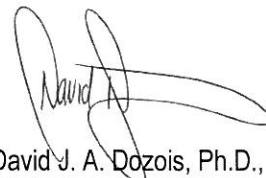
Research in the health sciences, natural sciences and engineering are intertwined – advances among researchers in the health sciences constantly stimulate progress and innovation in the natural sciences and engineering. There should be consistency across all three granting councils in terms of how eligibility criteria are set, including the nature of one's research rather than one's career path, as well as criteria for adviser qualification.

We ask that you consider our request in this letter and ensure that core funding is in place to advance knowledge and ensure that all graduate student research is appropriately supported.

Sincerely,



Lisa Votta-Bleeker, Ph.D.  
Associate Executive Director  
Director, Science Directorate  
Canadian Psychological Association



David J. A. Dozois, Ph.D., C.Psych.  
Chair, Scientific Affairs Committee  
President-Elect  
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#### **About the Canadian Psychological Association**

*The Canadian Psychological Association's (CPA) was organized in 1939 to improve the health and welfare of all Canadians; to promote excellence and innovation in psychological research, education, and practice; to promote the advancement, development, dissemination, and application of psychological knowledge; and to provide high-quality services to members. For more information about CPA, please visit: [www.cpa.ca](http://www.cpa.ca). To speak to someone about this letter, please contact Dr. Karen Cohen, Executive Director or Dr. Lisa Votta-Bleeker, Associate Executive Director, CPA, at [executiveoffice@cpa.ca](mailto:executiveoffice@cpa.ca).*